

Promising Practice: Incorporating the Café Method into the Classroom

College of Menominee Nation

Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program

In January of 2013, the College of Menominee Nation contracted Dr. Laura Weisel, Ph.D., from PowerPath to Education and Employment to present a continuing education workshop for the college's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program from the Office of Family Assistance. PowerPath was developed by Dr. Weisel and her colleagues with the intent of redesigning education. A portion of Dr. Weisel's presentation focused on how to help students build social capital skills, which include interpersonal skills such as the ability to communicate, collaborate, and work with others. Research has proven marginal learners do not possess these skills.

One of the goals of redesigning education was to *build learning communities* where students develop social capital skills to be successful in their learning. Several methodologies were explained by Dr. Weisel, but the Café Method was demonstrated. Participants experienced how the Café Method facilitated collaboration and problem solving and helped move information from short-term memory to long-term memory.

First, participants were divided into groups of five or six. Next, they were given a large piece of newsprint, and one person was asked to volunteer to be the group's host. The host of the "café" facilitated the group by being timekeeper and assuring each person had the opportunity to contribute to the group's conversation. Each group was assigned the same task: to explain how the brain works.

The previous day Dr. Weisel had explained how the brain works and what happens in the brain when trauma is experienced. Participants worked together and drew what they recalled from the presentation. Each of the drawings included three parts of the brain: the neocortex, where self-regulation and decision making occur; the limbic brain, where values and interpersonal skills are held; and the reptilian brain, where we feel safe or struggle to be safe, and where our fight-or-flight mechanisms are.

At the end of the designated time, each group chose a spokesperson to explain the group's picture. Even though there was one topic, there were variations in the pictures. The group members talked to each other, better recalled information from the previous day, and worked together to display their story.

What the HPOG team found fascinating was that when students are experiencing any type of traumatic event, they retreat to their safe place, in their reptilian brain; however, learning does not occur within the reptilian brain. They are just trying to survive when they use that part of the brain. This made the HPOG team aware they need to be looking at where the students are in their lives in order to help them to get to a place where they can learn, if they are not there.

Glenda Weigner, a member of the nursing faculty at College of Menominee Nation, previously used the traditional lecture methodology as her primary instructional method. After she attended Dr. Weisel's workshop in January, Glenda changed her teaching style to incorporate cooperative learning through implementation of the Café Method. In each class period, Glenda divides her class into small groups, each group is assigned a different topic from their reading to address, and their assignment is to graphically display the concept/topic. Each member of each group has to add to the explanation of their topic by graphically explaining the topic on a large piece of newsprint. After everyone completes their assignment, each group explains to the other class members what they learned. If a point is missed that Glenda deems significant, she adds the point to the newsprint. All newsprint graphics are hung in the classroom.

Glenda started utilizing the Café Method in the spring 2013 term. She compared test scores from that semester with those from the previous semester, where she used lecture, and the findings were astonishing. Test scores from students who she lectured to were Ds and Fs; test scores from the Café Method were As, Bs, and one C. Glenda believes this method is not only allowing students to become better collaborators and problem solvers, but also helping them retain what they learned. Students who had previously taken the course but not been successful have also communicated their increased satisfaction with the course because of a greater understanding of the content. Additionally, Glenda is also feeling more fulfilled as a faculty person as she now feels she facilitates learning more effectively.